Religion, Literature & the Arts

# A Grain of Eternity



Australian Catholic University, MacKillop Campus Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2nd-6th January, 1997

Australian International Conference Proceedings edited by Michael Griffith and James Tulip



Centre for Studies in Religion, Literature and the Arts Australian Catholic University

# A Grain of Eternity

1997 Australian International Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference Proceedings

Selected keynote addresses and papers

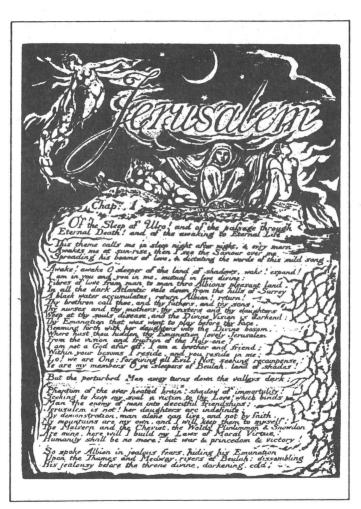
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#### **PREFACE**

The fourth International Conference on Religion, Literature and the Arts was held in Sydney, Australia, on January 2-6, 1997. The Conference was sponsored by Australian Catholic University, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the School of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney.

The Conference brought together scholars and practitioners in literature, history, music, visual arts, film, philosophy, religion studies and theology. A major concern was to highlight the role of the practising artist through forums on the Australian artistic experience, and to visit the outstanding exhibition of paintings and other art works, 'The Spirit of Place', then showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The Conference was particularly indebted to the MCA for its interest and support.

The theoretical and practical interests came into brilliant focus with a public performance of 'A Grain of Eternity: William Blake in Australia', a project arising from academic research at Australian Catholic University and the University of Sydney and developed in multimedia presentation by actors, singers, dancers, musicians and filmmakers under the direction of Jane Ahlquist. Blake's prophetic poems and images found a new and striking significance in being absorbed into the Australian artistic consciousness.

The papers of the Conference here published are a selection from some eighty presentations. The Centre for Studies in Religion, Literature and the Arts is particularly indebted to Dr Mark Byrne for his assistance in preparing the Proceedings for publication.

# THE CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN RELIGION, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS & THE RLA SOCIETY

The publication of these Proceedings coincides with two new important RLA developments. In March 1998 the Senate of Australian Catholic University gave formal approval to the establishment of a Centre for Studies in Religion, Literature and the Arts. The Centre is to be located at Mount Saint Mary Campus, Sydney, under the direction of Associate Professor Michael Griffith. It is intended to serve as a focus for the research and teaching activities of Australian Catholic University in the multidisciplinary fields of religion, literature and the arts, especially where the fields of study and disciplines involved interact.

The Centre will promote activities and close links with practising artists, and look for ways to support creative work in this field. The RLA Centre believes in the deep and powerful affinities between religious and artistic traditions, and recognises in Australian artists, writers and musicians many of the most gifted spiritual and prophetic figures in Australian cultural history.

The Centre will develop a network of relationships with the several campuses of Australian Catholic University together with other tertiary educational institutions around Australia and New Zealand. Links with similar bodies in the UK and USA will be maintained. The RLA Web site can be found at http://www.acu.edu.au/rla.

At the 1998 May Conference an Australasian Society for Studies in Religion, Literature and the Arts will be established. The plan is to set up an academic society for individual members in all tertiary and other institutions. It is proposed that the 1999 Conference will be held in Brisbane in association with some outstanding gallery exhibitions. Members joining the Society will benefit from receiving the Proceedings and Newsletter together with special rates at conferences and access to the facilities and resources of the new Centre.

Information about the Centre and the Society can be obtained from A/Prof Michael Griffith, Australian Catholic University, Mount Saint Mary Campus, 179 Albert Road, Strathfield, 2135, NSW. Phone 61 2 97392192, Fax 61 2 97392263, email M.griffith@mary.acu.edu.au

#### 'A GRAIN OF ETERNITY: WILLIAM BLAKE IN AUSTRALIA'

One of the happiest of creative outcomes at the 1997 RLA Conference was the collaboration of Jane Ahlquist and Michael Griffith on the subject of William Blake's impact and influence on Australian artists, musicians and writers over the past two centuries. It began as a piece of academic research by Michael Grifftih but developed into a multi-disciplinary and creative artistic project under the direction of Jane Alquist, a theatre producer and artist.

Nigel Butterly assembled and played Blake songs set to music by Margaret Sutherland, Mark Grandison, Alan Tregaskis and himself. David Hamilton, tenor and Christopher Allen, baritone were the singers. An archival tape of Lauris Elms of Alan Tregaskis Blake songs was also used at the Conference.

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The multimedia presentation involved the actors Ronald Falk and Linden Wilkinson, dancer Janice Claxton, and flautist Christine Draeger. The stage designer was Michael Day with lighting by Jan Primrose.

The production took place in the Amex Theatre of the Museum of Contemporary Art on Saturday, January 4, 1997.

The Australian connection with William Blake has a focus in the National Gallery of Victoria's world famous collection of Blake Prints and Illustrated Texts. A recent study of the visitors' book at the Gallery confirms the wide use of the Blake material by Australian writers and artists, both past and present.

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